Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Mesa, Lark Quarry Conservation Park, Qld.
photo by G&G Harris

Geraldine & Geoff Harris – "Exploring Outback Queensland's National Parks"

For our March monthly meeting, long-term CFNC members Geraldine and Geoff Harris treated us to some photographic highlights of their exciting trip to outback western Queensland in mid 2021. Initially planned for about 6 weeks travelling up to the Gulf and back with their new camper trailer, their trip was extended to about 4 months due to the sudden SA border closure thwarting their return home. They decided to continue enjoying their travels up to the tip of Cape York, then explored some more national parks in SW Queensland before eventually coming home via Birdsville and SA. Overall, they visited over 30 National Parks and conservation properties! Their talk concentrated on their travels through the arid country of central and south-west Queensland.

Geraldine and Geoff travelled through a huge variety of environments - spectacular and rugged Mesa country, dry spinifex and gibber plains, and birdlife-rich flood plains of the channel country. They gave us interesting accounts of the formation of mesas, gibber plains and mound springs, and showed us examples of fascinating geological formations such as "moon rocks" and "wave rocks". We had a taste of the amazing flora of the area that survives in such apparently harsh environments. Many of the parks visited were recovering from being grazing properties in the past. A visit to the Australian Wildlife Conservancy property Bowra was a particular favourite, sharing impressive bird lists with fellow campers each evening.

Another particular highlight of their journey was the visits to fossil-rich locations such as Winton and Opalton where excellent interpretive displays provided vivid impressions of the dinosaur era more than 95 million years ago, and the more recent Riversleigh World Heritage Site. Aboriginal history was also clear along the way with rock wells, stone working sites and sobering accounts of past massacres.

Geraldine and Geoff are still working through their numerous photographs to identify all the flora and fauna seen and they only had time to present maybe half of their trip. However, they noted sightings of the rare and very old Waddi tree (*Acacia peuce*; 200-300 years old, one of only 3 patches in the world), Red-backed

Kingfishers, Brolgas, Crimson Finches, Bustards, Agile Wallabies and the Tawny Coster Butterfly that has established here recently (first Australian records 2017) after travelling across the Timor Sea from Asia. Also evident was the damage to the environment caused by feral animals, especially pigs.

Thank you Geraldine and Geoff for sharing your adventures and your stunning photographs. We loved hearing about your beautiful walks across gibber plains, refreshing swimming holes shared with "freshies", canoeing up gorges, views of Ghost Gums against red sand hills, the generous outback hospitality of remote pubs, starry evenings and being "lulled" to sleep by the cries of Bush Stone-curlews!

Jenny Rolland

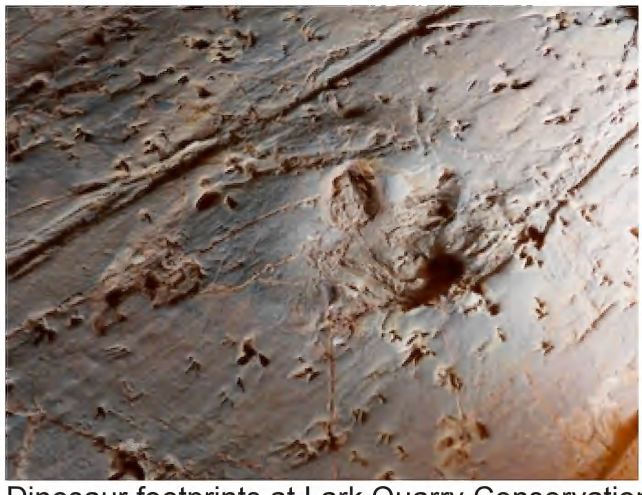
Big Red Sand Dune, Munga-Thirri NP;

Jump-up Loop Walk, Lark Quarry Conservation Park

Waddi Trees, near Birdsville

Idalia NP

Velvet-leaf Hibiscus (*Hibiscus krichauffianus*) Diamantina NP; Claypans, Diamantina NP



Dinosaur footprints at Lark Quarry Conservation Park; Channel Country, Bladensburg NP

March Excursion – Crusoe Reservoir, Kangaroo Flat

On Saturday 12 March, our Club arranged an excursion to this Bendigo bird spot with water, bush and open areas, which proved an excellent one. Ten birdwatchers met at 9.30 am and our walk turned into a wander of nearly three hours. The total number of species seen was 45, and included all the birds we wished for and more…see the attached list for the details.

It was a perfect morning without much wind, almost no disturbance from the water-sports people and an excellent range of habitats. The bird of the morning was the Rainbow Bee-eater. We saw these right around the Reservoir in large numbers. Perhaps they were gathering for their departure to warmer parts…we who are Covid-restrained can only envy their flights to Far North Queensland, PNG and Indonesia to escape the southern winter. Their colours were spectacular - no sign of moulting for them - and they were in groups of up to 8 or 10 even, soaring and dipping down to perch briefly with others, then heading out over the water to soar again and forage on the ground briefly. We heard their calls but these were not prominent.

Above the Bee-eaters we saw soaring Dusky Woodswallows, who again sometimes came down to perch and let us admire their pale blue bills and white-edged wings. Fairy and Tree Martins were also around in small numbers. We saw numbers of water birds, including some handsome Black-fronted Dotterel on the muddy edges of the Reservoir. There were many Little Pied Cormorants flying around the water, perched with wings spread out to dry off, or perched together on suitable branches of submerged trees. A few Australasian Grebes were in (presumably) the deeper parts of the Res.

Some raptors excited us in the forested areas around the water with taller trees: this was good for one to go hunting surreptitiously, sure enough, the Collared Sparrow-hawk. Thank you Euan for sorting this fairly large individual from its close look-alike, the Brown Goshawk. (Look for its square or notched tail, long middle toe, and dashing flight). Two Little Eagles and a Whistling Kite also showed up. A true joy was the sight of an Owlet-nightjar…(I find it too hard NOT to say “a darling little bird”). Apparently it is regularly seen in the same hollow in the same tree adjacent to the path thronged with walkers and bikers!

In the bush we had very many Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, and later in the walk in lower, drier bush we saw many Brown-headed Honeyeaters and plenty of other species, see our list. This area is known for its robins in winter-time, so a return trip is surely on the agenda.

Many thanks to Jenny Rolland and Euan Moore for their thoughtful leadership and careful preparation, and Euan and Peter for the bird list.

Rosemary Turner

Bee-eaters in numbers – Noel Young

Bird-spotting at Crusoe res. - Jenny Rolland

Above: Observing the Owlet-nightjar – Jenny Rolland

Right: Owlet-nightjar observing the observers – Noel Young

Left

Mixed habitat around the Crusoe Reservoir attracts a variety of birds. The "official" list for Crusoe and No 7 Park is 182 species.

Photo: Noel Young

Clockwise from above left: Meadow Argus *Junonia vallida;* Golden Orb-weaver *Trichonephila edulis* showing adult female and much smaller male; immature Black-chinned Honeyeater not yet showing full adult colours; Rainbow Bee-eater.

- photos by Euan Moore

List for the excursion - compiled by Peter Turner

Peaceful Dove	4	Tree Martin	5
Crested Pigeon	1	Fairy Martin	1
Dusky Moorhen	4	Grey Fantail	4
Eurasian Coot	6	Willie Wagtail	1
Australasian Grebe	3	Rufous Whistler	3
Little Black Cormorant	1	Grey Shrike-thrush	3
Little Pied Cormorant	9	Magpie-lark	7
Australasian Darter	1	Superb Fairy-wren	5
Masked Lapwing	3	Dusky Woodswallow	3
Black-fronted Dotterel	4	Brown Treecreeper	1
White-faced Heron	2	White-throated Treecreeper	1
Black Swan	2	Spotted Pardalote	5
Pacific Black Duck	4	Black-chinned Honeyeater	1
Collared Sparrowhawk	1	Brown-headed Honeyeater	9
Little Eagle	2	Fuscous Honeyeater	3
Whistling Kite	1	Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	16
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	1	Noisy Miner	8
Crimson Rosella	1	Red Wattlebird	3
Eastern Rosella	2	White-winged Chough	12
Red-rumped Parrot	4	Grey Butcherbird	1
Australian Owlet-nightjar	1	Australian Magpie	5
Rainbow Bee-eater	22	Striated Pardalote	4
Welcome Swallow	6		

Cordyceps tenuipes

Euan Moore

This fungus has not been recorded locally although it may occur in the wetter forests around Trentham and Daylesford. Members of the genus Cordyceps are sometimes referred to as 'Vegetable Caterpillars'. This is not because of the shape of their fruiting bodies, which in many cases are cylindrical and look a bit like a caterpillar on a stem but due to the way they parasitise the larvae of beetles and moths. When the spores infect an insect larva the fungus grows and eventually consumes the larva replacing the larva tissue with a mass of fungus tissue. It then grows the fruiting body, shown here, which extends above the ground or beyond the wood where the larva was living. Cordyceps tenuipes has this branched fruiting body unlike the club-shaped fruiting bodies of other members of the genus. It is a cosmopolitan species with records in Australia, NZ, North and Central America, Europe and South Asia. This photo was taken at Triplet Falls in the Otway Ranges.

Birds of Sutton Grange March 2022

Nigel Harland

Superb Fairy-wren	Red-browed Finch	White-browed Scrubwren
Australian Magpie	Australian Raven	Laughing Kookaburra
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Long-billed Corella
Crimson Rosella	New Holland Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Common Bronzewing	Red Wattlebird	Galah
Striated Pardalote	Grey Fantail	Grey Currawong
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Eastern Rosella	Brown Thornbill
Brown-headed Honeyeater	White-throated Treecreeper	Varied Sittella
White-eared Honeyeater	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Boobook Owl
Eastern Spinebill		

First Boobook for a long time.
Yellow-rumped Thornbill not at all common.

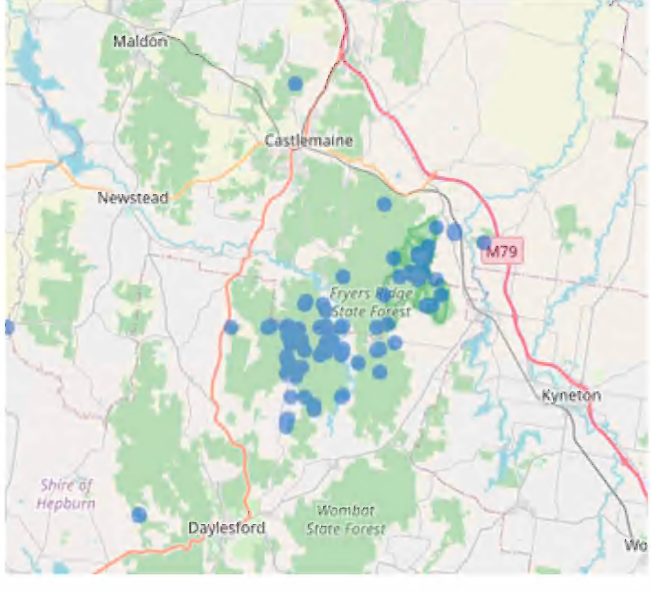
Fryerstown Grevillea Project

The Threatened Species Conservancy is an independent not-for-profit organisation who plan and implement recovery programs for threatened species.

Fryerstown Grevilllea *G obtecta*

They have recently started a project to determine the range and population size of the Endangered Fryerstown Grevillea (FFG) as well as a number of other plant species that occur in the region but are not well known. These include *Acacia sporadica*, CR, *Platylobium rotundum*, En, and *Pultenaea graveolens*, EN.

Distribution of *Grevillea obtecta*.
Source: Atlas of Living Australia.



The researchers have developed a protocol for recording their target species in the field using an app on a phone to record location, photographs and data such as population size and extent.

If you are interested in getting involved with this project please email castlemainefnc@hotmail.com.

- Euan Moore

April Observations. (1944)

George Broadway

Notes on specimens sent to Mr Crosbie Morrison, editor of "Wildlife" magazine in April of 1944.

Crosbie Morrison also used to do a broadcast to schools; this was one I very much enjoyed. Another one was by Professor G. S. Browne; he dealt with current events. Also very interesting. Years later when I did a degree in Education at Melbourne University I got to meet him when he was the Professor of Education.

As we have seen, many specimens appeared on a regular basis, so by 1944 there was not much that was new.

INSECTS

SS 2880, Lochiel: The white moths, the female having a light brown tail, were male and female of the Gold-tail Moth, one of the Tussock moths which are generally known here as Browntails. The brown fur of the tail is very densely matted and may be teased out to cover a comparatively enormous area. Being loosely set it adheres to the eggs as they are laid thus forming a cover to hide them.

Ferntree Gully: Rat-tailed maggot, larva of the Bee-fly, member of the Family *Syrphidae* which mimic bees as they buzz about flowers apparently looking for nectar but in reality preying on the small insects they find there. See Apr '18

Springvale: The beetle found inside the wood is the Firewood Beetle, or Longicorn Beetle, *Phoracantha tricuspis*. Many mentions, see Nov '16

Hawthorn: Emperor Gum Moth. As the name implies they feed on Eucalypt leaves but also some introduced plants, especially the Pepper Tree. See June '17;3

Carlton: Black Field Cricket, common in summer, and differs from the Mole Cricket which lives below ground.

Horsham: Commonly called Elephant Beetle, is actually a root-boring weevil, the Gumtree Root Weevil.

Natimuk: Fiddler Beetle, a leaf-eating beetle, member of the Scarab family. So named because of the pattern on the back. 6 '18

Horsham: Box with a hole eaten in it. Probably a wood-eating beetle.

Preston: Looked like a bug but didn't smell like a bug, although smell was penetrating. Actually a beetle of the *Bombardier* family See Mar'17

Pascoe Vale: Grey Elephant Beetle, a borer of the roots of trees, so generally a pest of forest and orchard.

SPIDERS

Woodford (Q): Large *Nephila* spider, known also as the "Golden-web Spinner" The further north, the bigger they grow. May'17

Yarraville: Orchard Spider or "Bird Dropping Spider", Frequently mentioned. see May'17

S.S. 3275, Lawrence via Newstead: (Does anyone know of it ?) The spider found in the state forest was an unusually large specimen of the Triangle spider, *Arcys clavigera*. Little is known of its habits but it is one of the spiders that build a web snare for trapping prey and is harmless to humans.

BIRDS

Dandenong: The little brown birds following the Blue Wren are not supernumary wives but young from an earlier brood. Young males will not put on their blue coats until the following season.

Toorak: The long grey bird with the harsh call is the Wattlebird.

Geelong: The habit of pecking at the window is not confined to blackbirds, many kinds of birds do it as they perceive a rival in their own reflection. (I am presently having trouble with a brown Thornbill which keeps attacking itself in the rear vision mirror on my car and leaving a mess on the door. I keep forgetting to cover up the mirror. Last year it was Wrens doing the same thing)

Geelong: It is not unique for a "male" Cockatoo, after many years of solitary confinement to produce an egg. When birds change sex as they have been known to do, the change is usually from female to male. (Reminds me of animals in which the removal of the dominant male from the group means that the dominant female will change sex and become male)

GENERAL

S.S. Lake Charm: The quaint little creature was a Book Scorpion or Pseudoscorpion, *Chelifer*. Often found among books and papers or as a passenger on flies and beetles. The number of legs and the big claws in front show it to be a member of the Scorpion group but it lacks a tail with the sting in the end. See Jun '17

Albert Park: Kangaroos never rear more than one joey at a time as there is only one active teat in the pouch.

Noble Park: Fruit of the potato; it is very like a small tomato, because both potatoes and tomatoes belong to the Nightshade family.

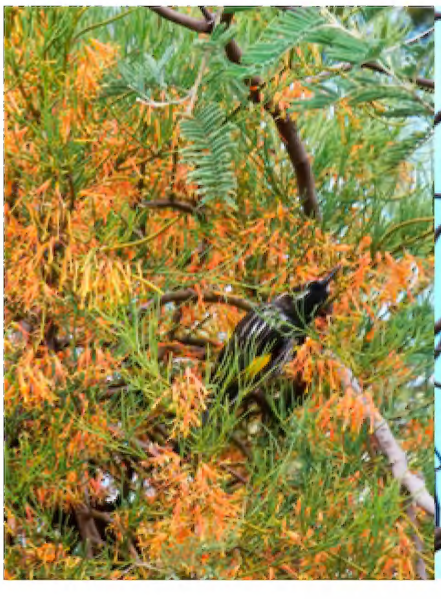
Footscray: The biscuit starfish, *Pentagonaster.* The upper surface is well camouflaged, sand coloured and divided into rounded "pebbles" which resemble large grains of sand. As a starfish it has no tentacles, each corner of the regular pentagon represents an arm.

S.S. Ni Ni Well: Eggs of one of the smaller skink lizards. It will be interesting to see if your eggs hatch as something usually goes wrong when they are removed from the ground. Even if they are kept moist the moving seems to affect them.

Recent observations

Noel Young Many of the wattles planted by Landcare along the Happy Valley track are now adorned with Wire-leaf Mistletoe *Amyema preissii*, which blossoms in late summer with orange coloured flowers. In early February when they were at a peak, dozens of New Holland Honeyeaters were attracted to them (probably to the exclusion of many other birds, though not it seemed to the bees)

Amyema preissii grows almost exclusively on Acacia, from which it extracts water and minerals, but as it has chlorophyll, it makes its own carbohydrates.



Lisa Hewitt - I'd like to share my photos of a family of blue-faced honeyeaters that have been frequenting my ash trees this summer in Campbells Creek.
The guide says they're uncommon, but I read somewhere they're becoming more common in this area.

[There has been a few seen in the district every year for the last several seasons. The adults (left) sport the blue facial skin patch. In juveniles (right) it is greenish-yellow - Ed]

Helen Lawrence –

Eastern brown snake *(Pseudonaja textilis*). Clearly mature with that large body. A nanosecond after I took this it doubled back under the bonnet of the car. Seemed pretty large (for a brown snake).

Sighted at Werona on Werona-Kingston Road.

From your Committee
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the AGM on March 11th, all nominations for office bearers and committee members were appointed to the 2022/23 committee. Judith Nimmo was warmly welcomed as a new committee member and retiring committee member Dianne Thomson was thanked for her contributions.

MEMBERSHIP FEES DUE

Membership subscriptions for 2022/23 are now due. (see page 12 for categories) Your completed membership form (available from the CFNC website) can be mailed with cheque to the club, or completed with details of direct payment into the CFNC account (details on the membership form), or scanned and mailed or emailed to castlemainefnc@hotmail.com

COMING EVENTS

Monthly Meeting Friday 8th April, 7.30pm
Uniting Church Fellowship Room, Lyttleton Street

We are delighted to announce that our April monthly meeting will be held in person at last. Members can arrive at the hall from 7.15pm and are welcome to stay after the meeting for supper and a chat. Please sign in on arrival. We recommend wearing a mask in the hall.

Our guest speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session when members can share recent interesting sightings with an option to show a photo or two. If you have photos for the meeting, please email JPEG file(s) to Euan Moore at calamanthus5@bigpond.com by noon on the day of the meeting.

Guest Speaker: Ian Higgins "The route ahead: from rarity to …?"

Ian Higgins, well known local landcarer, co-founder of 'Friends of Campbells Creek Landcare' and 'Victorian Landcarer 2017' will be the guest speaker. Ian will consider the future for our district's rare or restricted plant species. He will explore the opportunities to prevent further loss of plant species and restoration of diverse native vegetation in the Mount Alexander region.

Excursion: Saturday 9th April, 1.30pm – Campbells Creek Landcare

Leader: Ian Higgins

Ian will guide members along sections of the Campbells Creek walking trail showcasing the restoration work of the local Landcare group over the past 30 years. He will show us a wildflower restoration experimental area and an area for restoration of a heathy woodland. He will also demonstrate how landcare efforts are reversing weed-dominated floodplains to native grasslands and riparian wetlands.

Meet at the Octopus (Duke St, opposite the Castle Motel) for departure at **1.30pm** or at the northern end (after the seal ends) of Honeycomb Road, Campbells Creek.

Bring: Water, snacks, sturdy shoes, hat and afternoon tea.

The Field Trip will be cancelled in extreme weather conditions or if there is a high fire risk.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

PROGRAM

Due to the easing of COVID restrictions, our April and May monthly meetings will be held in person in the Fellowship Room of the Uniting Church Hall, Lyttleton St., commencing at 7.30pm (access from 7.15pm).

Our guest speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session when members can share recent interesting sightings with an option to show a photo or two. If you have photos for the meeting, please email JPEG file(s) to Euan Moore at calamanthus5@bigpond.com by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions will be held on the Saturday after the monthly meeting. Meet at the Octopus (opposite the motel in Duke St) for departure at 1.30pm unless otherwise advised.

Fri Apr 8 Meeting: Speaker – Ian Higgins "The route ahead: from rarity to…."

Sat Apr 9 Excursion: 1.30pm "Campbells Creek Landcare restoration work" with Ian Higgins.

Fri May 13 Meeting: Speaker – Peter Jacobs (Invasive Species Council) "Feral deer - managing and monitoring."

Sat May 14 Excursion ALL DAY: 10am "Seeding Victoria's seed bank", Creswick and the La Gerche walk, Creswick SF.

Mon May 16: **Roadside Clean-up** 9am Tait's Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine

Fri Jun 10 Meeting: Speaker – Scarlett Howard (Deakin University) "Bees and their ability to learn".

Sat Jun 11 Excursion: 1.30pm "Mosses" with Cassia Read, Clinkers Hill Reserve.

Club website (Web master: Ron Wescott) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Castlemaine Naturalist - email newsletter material to: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

*Deadline for the May edition is April 29.

Subscriptions for 2022

Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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